

Environmental Audit Committee

Oral evidence: The environmental sustainability of the Department for Education, HC 1839

Wednesday 18 October 2023

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Members present: Philip Dunne (Chair); Barry Gardiner; Dr Matthew Offord; Chris Skidmore; Cat Smith; Claudia Webbe.

Education Committee Member present: Mr Robin Walker.

Questions 1 - 58

Witnesses

I: The Baroness Barran MBE, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Minister for the School System and Student Finance), Department for Education; and Dr Jonathan Dewsbury, Director of Capital Operations and Net Zero, Department for Education.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: The Baroness Barran MBE and Dr Jonathan Dewsbury.

Q1 Chair: Good afternoon. Welcome to the Environmental Audit Committee for our one-off inquiry into the sustainability of the Department for Education and all its entities. Before I introduce the Minister, to whom we are very grateful, I would like to welcome Robin Walker, who is the Chairman of the Education Select Committee and formerly an Education Minister, who may have had some part in much of what we will discuss. Welcome, Robin. In particular, welcome to Baroness Barran, the Minister for the Department for Education. Perhaps you would be kind enough to introduce Jonathan Dewsbury.

Baroness Barran: Absolutely. Jonathan, do you want to go ahead and introduce yourself?

Dr Dewsbury: Yes; thank you for having me, Committee. My name is Jonathan Dewsbury, and I am the director of capital operations and net zero. I have had that role from 11 September. Prior to that, I was the chief sustainability officer at DFE, so I prepared the strategy on behalf of Education Ministers and started to oversee the implementation of it.

Q2 Chair: Excellent, thank you. I think that you wanted to say one or two words to set the scene from your perspective. We are happy for you to do that.

Baroness Barran: Thank you, Chair. I wanted to set today's evidence in the context of our wider climate change and sustainability strategy. The school estate is an incredibly important dimension, but the way that we are approaching this is to say that we are in a unique position to influence 16 million students of differing ages in their attitude towards sustainability and climate change, their knowledge, and the skills that they develop.

In the strategy, we have set out our plans for climate education, for green skills, for estates, for digital infrastructure, for the supply chain, and for the international dimension. Forgive the snappy titles, but we are aiming to inspire first, particularly with young people through the curriculum, as well as through their participation with a National Education Nature Park and the Climate Action Awards. We are doing a great deal of planning so that when we get to the action, we make sure that we execute as well and as effectively as possible. This is not to diminish where I think the focus of the Committee's questions today will be—on the estate and decarbonisation—but it is to set this in a wider context of how we see our role as a Department in the future of the planet.

Q3 Chair: We very much welcome the work the Department is doing to introduce climate education within the curriculum in different ways. I think that when Robin was in the Department, he recommended that we



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should reintroduce natural history O-level as an option in the curriculum and I am very pleased that that has happened. We admire what you are doing in that respect.

As you say, this inquiry is focused more on the sustainability of the built estate, for which you are responsible. As a Committee, we are gently working our way around Government Departments focused on this. We have the support of the National Audit Office, which has written its report on this, which has informed the work that we are doing in this session. That is the context from our side.

The strategy that was published 18 months ago gives you about eight years to deliver on the significant ambitions and set of commitments within it. From the work that the NAO has done, it seems to us that you spent much of the first year and a half out of eight trying to come to grips with the governance arrangements for how you will deliver this strategy. Could you start by confirming whether or not the governance is now set and clear, and has been communicated throughout the Department and its bodies?

Baroness Barran: Yes, thank you. The short answer is that I think that we have made really good progress since the NAO visited and wrote its report. The role of chief sustainability officer has been confirmed at director level and we now have a deputy director as the senior responsible officer for delivery in this area. That gives us more capacity so that our CSO can get involved across government in all the inter-departmental and cross-departmental work that is happening. We have senior civil servant sponsors from every part of the Department who are involved in the governance of this. The permanent secretary appointed the DG of our strategy group to be the champion among our directors-general. This sits in my ministerial portfolio, and one of our non-executives, Jack Boyer, is very involved and attends the cross-government Climate Non-Executive Board Members Liaison Forum.

The other thing that has happened is that all our DGs have received training on the new environmental principles legal duty. Training is happening for Ministers and our private offices. About 1,550 staff across the Department have engaged with the environmental principles, either through direct training or piloting of resources. We have also done an all-staff broadcast on the principles, which reached about 2,500 members of the Department.

Q4 **Chair:** Staying within the Department for a moment, is it a regular agenda item on the Department's board to review delivery against strategy?

Baroness Barran: On the board, we tend to take a deep dive on different topics. It is certainly something that I regularly review in my role as Minister. I worked out my top ministerial priorities with my private office and this is one of them. That is not to say we would not do a deep dive on the board; we might. I also make sure that I update the



Secretary of State in our bilats and have regular meetings with the team to make sure delivery is on track.

Q5 Chair: Given the wide range in size, number and variety of properties within the Department—the school estate, the university estate and so on—do you have a good handle on delivery against your objectives and the strategy mechanisms to be able to influence what is happening across the estate?

Baroness Barran: As I am sure you are aware, we do not own and control the school and university estate in the way that other Government Departments might own and control their estate. I am sure that we will come on and talk about this a bit more, but on the one hand, we definitely have a role in encouraging the behaviour that we want to see on the ground from those who are responsible.

If I start with our schools, whether that is local authorities, academy trusts or dioceses, there are ways that we can influence their behaviour and work out what levers we have. At the same time, we believe that it works better to have that distributed responsibility rather than us controlling everything from the centre. There are certain things that obviously we do control, such as the delivery of the school rebuilding programme, for example. For schools that are applying for funding for condition improvement, they now have to demonstrate their environmental sustainability audits. We are trying to weave this in and use those levers at the right intensity, if I can put it like that.

The other bit—again, I am sure we will cover this in more detail—is that we are in the process of doing a few different things, including testing and piloting a number of approaches and getting absolute clarity and consistency in how we measure the risk in the school estate so that we start from a clear and solid base from which we measure progress.

Dr Dewsbury: On the baselining of the education estate in terms of emissions, we have worked with the higher education and further education system to set a standardised way for them to report emissions. We published that in January '24, and that did a baseline of the emissions—

Chair: January of?

Dr Dewsbury: Of '23, sorry—I am getting ahead of myself. On the emissions for the school and nursery estate, we have shared our draft standardised reporting framework with the union groups and our user group, and we are hoping to publish that later this year. This sets the baseline of how the sector should report and, therefore, allows us to quantify the emissions more accurately to then be able to set some scientific targets moving forward.

Q6 Chair: On delivery levers, I can see that where you are providing funding for new build or for refurbs on the properties that have been subject to



RAAC and other issues, where you have to undertake a rebuild or a new build, you will have influence. What levers do you have for the existing built estate in addition to establishing the baseline? How can you help them to apply for the public building decarbonisation money that has been available, for example?

Baroness Barran: We do a few different things. Jon is much closer to the decarbonisation scheme than I am, so I will let him pick that up.

The other thing that we offer is a service that is free to all schools, called the school resource management service. Included within that is all sorts of practical advice on procurement, management of energy bills, and in particular, maintenance of the school estate. That is an optional service. Schools do not have to take it, but I gather that interest has increased in that, understandably, given what has happened to energy prices. Do you want to say a word about the decarbonisation scheme?

Dr Dewsbury: Yes. The Committee will be aware that the public sector decarbonisation scheme is consistently oversubscribed. We have worked closely with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to make sure that the education sector is getting its fair portion from that pot. That portion is defined by the percentage of emissions from education in the public sector. It is between 30% and 35% of that pot. We have seen £342 million from the public sector decarbonisation scheme from phase 3. We recognise the challenges—

Chair: Did you say £342 million?

Dr Dewsbury: Yes.

Chair: Had you had any from previous phases?

Dr Dewsbury: We will have had some from previous phases.

Chair: It would be very helpful if you could send us a note of how much you have received, both in absolute terms and as a proportion since it began.

Dr Dewsbury: Yes; we will write to you with that. We recognise the challenge for, particularly, small schools or a single academy trust accessing the public sector decarbonisation scheme. We are working collaboratively with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero to look at how phase 4 might be changed. For phase 3, we moved the application window out of the summer holidays in conjunction with DESNZ and we ran webinars with Salix, the organisation that runs the loan scheme, to help schools with their applications.

Q7 **Chair:** I think that we will come on to some more questions on that in a minute. I have a final question about the overall governance. Your strategy had 143 different commitments. Do you now have a delivery schedule for when you will meet each of those commitments and how?



Baroness Barran: We certainly have a delivery schedule for them all, but some are inevitably much more precise than others. Some are contingent on others. I would say that for the next 18 months to two years we have a pretty detailed plan. Inevitably, it becomes higher level beyond that. I suppose I would be more worried if it was super-precise in a way. I think it is realistic in its ambition.

Q8 Mr Robin Walker: Following on on the point of delivery schedule, how do you know if you are on track to deliver all your sustainability commitments? Historically, the Department has been able to make some eye-watering commitments. For example, I think that Damian Hinds promised to get rid of all single-use plastics in schools by 2022, but we all know teachers' tendency to laminate things and I do not think that was ever a realistic promise. How do we ensure that these will be measured and delivered on?

The NAO report highlights confidence in delivery of statutory environmental obligations from May. There is at least one issue on water efficiency, which is highlighted in red in terms of the Department's confidence there, so where you come across issues like that, how do you address them and how do you make sure that you are confident?

Baroness Barran: Our overall risk rating on the delivery plan is amber-red. I was slightly surprised at that when I went through it with the team. There are seven commitments that are off track out of 143. It felt a bit harsh to me. I think that the real reason is that this is a long-term plan and we are relatively early in it. Without going into the niceties of how different people use and understand risk registers, I think that it is the length of time ahead and how early we are in the process that is the big determinant of this. It is an eight-year delivery timescale for the strategy and obviously we are early on in that.

Going back to the questions around governance, clearly it has been important to put in place senior civil servant sponsors to make sure that that risk is managed. I think that the biggest risk, which is why we are here today, is making sure that we can prioritise funding—working with colleagues in the Treasury—for decarbonisation and for adaptation of the education estate, which, as you will understand very well, is incredibly important. Our belief is that the more detailed and the more accurate the analysis we carry out, the more reasonable our case will be for additional funding to address this. There are some commitments that are off track. I do not know if you want to talk about any of those in particular.

Q9 Mr Robin Walker: I think that it is just water efficiency that is particularly highlighted in the NAO report. Obviously, this is a statutory obligation that comes into effect in November this year, as I understand. We already talked a bit about training senior officials in those environmental principles and that is very welcome, but if there are issues that are liable to be missed or red-rated, what is the process for trying to put those back on track?



Baroness Barran: Do you want to say a word about water efficiency?

Dr Dewsbury: Yes. First of all, we are working with Ofwat and Market Operator Services Ltd to make sure that 10,000 of those schools are more water-efficient. In our specifications for buildings—which is not just new builds; it is also refurbishment or replacement of blocks, and that standard is used by other responsible bodies who deliver in other ways—we have a metric against the total water use and thus water efficiency. We are clear that any future standard we set for how our buildings are refurbished or retrofitted hits those water efficiency targets—less than 10 litres per day per person.

The Minister mentioned the education estate being devolved and there being over 3,000 responsible bodies. One of the ways we are trying to instigate action is through the climate action plans. The ask is for all education settings to have a climate action plan in place by 2025, where they need to outline their approach to decarbonisation, their approach to adaptation resilience—this is where water efficiency would come—their approach to biodiversity, and their approach to climate education and green careers. We are in the process of tendering for the service to support schools in delivering those. That will go live from next year. That is accompanied by a network of ambassadors, which calls on experts from universities and engineering companies to go out to support schools and make sure that they have the right resilience plans in place to deal with the challenges we will face.

Q10 **Mr Robin Walker:** Will you work with trust boards and the National Governance Association—organisations like those—to make sure that they have the capacity they need to play their part in formulating those plans?

Dr Dewsbury: The NGA sits on our user group, and we test all our policies and delivery plans with that user group. We will absolutely work with trusts. In delivering these climate action plans, we will approach trusts to see how they work best with their particular school network.

Q11 **Mr Robin Walker:** Baroness Barran, in your opening comments, you mentioned that the strategy went more widely than just the school estate. I played a small part in feeding into some of those curriculum and qualification commitments in the strategy and declare my interest in that respect. Can you give any update on the progress of the natural history GCSE, the nature pathway and the contribution of that as a primary science model curriculum and the emphasis on green jobs? Is there anything useful for the Committee to know in that respect?

Baroness Barran: We aim that the natural history GCSE should be taught first by 2025. As you will know, introducing a new GCSE is a complex exercise, so we are working very hard at the moment on the subject content and curriculum, and working hard with the exam board. We will do a full public consultation on it next year when we have those ideas clearer. Forgive me, you also asked about green skills, I think.



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Mr Robin Walker: It was about green skills and the primary science model curriculum, which was due to look at that broader nature pilot through schools as well.

Baroness Barran: Yes. Do you want to take the primary one and I can take the skills?

Dr Dewsbury: Yes. The other commitment in that space was the science CPD. That has been delivered with climate change and sustainability in science teachers' CPD. The primary science model curriculum has been delivered through Oak National Academy and it plans to roll out the curriculum map between this autumn and September 2024. It is working with the University of York and CAPE, the Climate Adapted Pathways—I cannot remember what the E stands for, sorry. That sits alongside the curriculum material we are delivering through the National Education Nature Park.

The other question you had was on the National Education Nature Park. This is the concept where we consider the whole of the education estate as one national park and empower learners and young people to look after it like a national park. If we increase the biodiversity and resilience of it to the effects of overheating, drought and flood, we can make a big difference to the landmass of the UK. That was soft-launched on 4 October. That is now live. You can look at what schools are engaging with it. In the initial challenge, the hidden nature challenge, we had over 2,000 uploads from students. We have had 164 schools start mapping out their estate already. We plan to do a more formal launch with more communications around that later in November in the build-up to COP because the Minister and the Department have ambitions to use the National Education Nature Park as an inspiration on an international level, not just a national level.

Baroness Barran: One of the thoughts we have is that children could maybe compare the biodiversity of their schools across countries, not just within the UK. If anyone gets a chance to go and visit their local primary school getting involved in all this, it is a very uplifting visit.

On green skills, you will be aware that there is huge ambition within the net zero strategy and the energy security strategy that we should create 190,000 green jobs by 2025. We have already had 100 green apprenticeships in different industries approved.¹ We have a Green Jobs Delivery Group, which will publish an action plan in this area in 2024.

Q12 **Chair:** Can I interrupt for a second? Could they include in that delivery plan a definition of what they mean by—

¹ Baroness Barran has contacted the Committee to say that she misspoke here, and meant to say, 'we have already had 44 green apprenticeships standards in different industries approved, with hundreds of people undertaking those apprenticeships'.



Baroness Barran: By a green job? Okay. I think that is a very fair challenge. The other thing that the Committee will be aware of is our investment in institutes of technology where we bring together local colleges, universities and employers focusing on some of the technical challenges that we face. Energy and agritech are both big parts of that.

The other thing, with a different approach, are the skills bootcamps, which are free—typically 16-week skills training. For example, there are boot camps in the installation of solar panels, heat pumps and so on. We are getting very good feedback from those. I suppose that this is not something that explicitly intends to address green skills but I think it will do. You will all be aware of the lifelong learning entitlement. That legislation will allow people to upskill and reskill through their careers in more bite-sized chunks and access the funding to be able to do that. Obviously, as skills demands evolve, hopefully that will provide the funding to facilitate a lot of people to get the right training.

Q13 **Mr Robin Walker:** Thank you. I want to return to the public sector decarbonisation grant. You mentioned that you are working closely to try to increase the share that the Department gets to more like its share of emissions. I think that 37% is the share of emissions from the education estate, and it is getting slightly less—30% on rounds to date according to the NAO report. Within that, though, is there not a particular challenge in that the HE sector has punched above its weight and schools have punched below their weight in previous rounds of the bidding for public sector decarbonisation? Is there not a particular challenge because of the shape of the school estate and its very devolved nature that we probably need to go further to address?

Baroness Barran: I do not think we would disagree with you. The numbers speak for themselves, but I think that it is also fair to say that that has improved a lot in recent rounds. As Jon said earlier, we are working very closely with DESNZ on the next phase of the funding, trying to make sure that it works better for the school estate. The example we hear is that the first-past-the-post system for funding just does not work very well for schools. We do not know what the final outcome will be, but I think that it is fair to say we will be in very constructive conversations. The aim is to get the right share to schools in a way that works for them.

Q14 **Mr Robin Walker:** Would you be able to provide the Committee with any figures, either historical or in the current round, on the breakdown within the education estate of where public sector decarbonisation grant is going? I think that that will be interesting and valuable from the perspective of scrutiny.

Baroness Barran: Absolutely and that ties in, does it not—

Dr Dewsbury: I can give you the breakdown for phase 3B, which was 2023 and was 122 education settings. There was £168 million in total—£51 million to schools and academies, £84 million to higher education and further education, and £33 million to school-only. You suggested that



the contribution from the PSDS was less than 30%. We get it to 30%² because we include £55 million from phase 3B that is allocated through local authorities, so where the education sector applications are mixed with local authority grants.

The Minister might want to also speak about recognising where the public sector decarbonisation scheme is. We have been thinking about the approach we have set out for how we transition the estate—to innovate, test and invest. One way of investing is through the public sector decarbonisation scheme. Another way we have been looking at is how we might use some of our capital more strongly through something we call the net zero accelerator service. We have just tendered for five organisations to test the feasibility of that, which is that if we aggregate groups of schools together, we could introduce fabric/condition improvements and local energy generation, and we could see the reduction of energy costs paid back to reutilise that money further forward.

Baroness Barran: Part of the hypothesis behind the net zero accelerator scheme—as Jon said, we are in the feasibility stage that finishes in December. Depending on the findings of that, we would aim to go into a larger trial from the spring of next year. We know that in the private sector, there is a huge amount of capital that wants to come into this area, and we are seeing whether there is a way that we can access that in the interests of speedier decarbonisation, but not in a way that crosses any Treasury red lines. That is what we are working for, and if it works, it would have a huge potential, but we are in the early stages of that. We think that it is an important thing to test out.

Q15 **Chair:** Thank you. Picking that up, before I ask Matthew Offord, would that apply both to the academy sector as well as the currently maintained schools?

Baroness Barran: Yes; I think it would in some ways be easier to do in academies than it would be in maintained schools.

Chair: We are expecting a vote. The Minister is on his feet in the Commons, but we will start Matthew Offord's question.

Q16 **Dr Matthew Offord:** I will be brief. Given that the Department is not expected to set the emission targets for the best part of another two years, and that by 2032 the Department will be expected to reduce emissions by 50% and by 75% by 2037, do you think that is enough time for the Department to play its part in the carbon neutral agenda?

Baroness Barran: That is a huge question. What I suppose is behind that is our ability to secure sufficient funding principally from the Treasury to carry out the required decarbonisation. The work that we are doing is to establish a climate risk framework for every school. We will

² Baroness Barran has since informed the Committee that Dr Dewsbury meant to say 'We get it to 37%...'



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launch that in January 2024, with it being fully embedded by January 2025. That will allow each individual school to be able to assess their risk in relation to temperature increases, risk of flooding and risk of drought. We need the clearest possible picture and this is one route to us getting that. We will also have a lot of information from the National Education Nature Park, from the digital uploads of the biodiversity within each individual school estate. We will get a much richer picture quite quickly—*[Interruption.]*

Chair: Minister, I am sorry but a Division has been called.

Baroness Barran: I will hold my breath and finish—

Chair: If you would not mind concluding that.

Baroness Barran: Briefly—

Chair: Very briefly, or we could come back in.

Baroness Barran: I am happy to cover it in more detail. Clearly, there is a major financial commitment that needs to be made both in school rebuilding and in retrofit, but I think that our responsibility is to be as accurate as possible in what is needed.

Chair: We will come back to that in a minute, and I will call a halt for the moment.

Baroness Barran: Very good.

Sitting suspended.

On resuming—

Q17 **Chair:** Where we left off, I think, Minister, you had not quite completed your answer to Matthew Offord.

Baroness Barran: Thank you very much, Chair. On whether we have enough time to deliver, we are clear on what the targets are. I think that we would agree that the trajectory to get there is extremely challenging and we know from the UCL model that its estimate is that about 80% of the school estate will require significant investment.

On the things that we are doing in addition to the climate risk assessment framework, which I mentioned before the vote, we have a number of pilots and pathfinder projects—if I may give a couple of examples. I am happy to send the Committee the full list, but there are 285 schools trialling innovative energy management systems. There is work going on with 550 schools who are at risk of surface water flooding to mitigate that risk, and we have 22 schools replacing gas, coal and oil boilers with ground and air source heat pumps.³ Some of this is important, as the

³ Baroness Barran has contacted the Committee to say that she misspoke here, and meant to say, 'we have 53 schools replacing gas, coal and oil boilers with ground and air



Committee understands, because we are such a large client in the UK construction industry that what we do and the standards we set will have ramifications more broadly.

The other thing that I think is interesting is the behavioural change aspects. About 44% of schools that we tracked had smart meters, and that is leading to a significant change in their behaviour and energy usage. As Jon and I both said earlier, we think that the climate action plans will also lead to a change. None of this is to diminish the scale of the challenge. The Committee is absolutely right to focus on that and so are we.

Q18 Dr Matthew Offord: I am grateful for that because I share your concern that you will be able to achieve that. In the written answers that I have received from the Education Minister, he said that he has not estimated the cost of retrofitting the maintained school estate and he has also not made an assessment on the percentage of maintained schools that will be retrofitted by 2050. In addition, he says that by December 2023 he will be able to produce a report on the implementation of progress for the Department for Education's sustainability and climate change strategy. Unless you know something that I do not or that indeed the Minister does, I am very concerned that you will not be able to achieve the results in that time. The 2050 target is obviously even longer than the target that we have just mentioned—by 2032. You mentioned earlier targets and the reported stage of those. I think that you indicated that they would be at the individual level of each school. Is that correct?

Baroness Barran: We will have a framework where each school will be able to assess their risk. In our understanding of the school estate, you will be aware that we do the condition data collection survey. We do a visual survey of every school in the school estate. We have that picture and that is shared back with schools. Jon, are there other elements that I have forgotten?

Dr Dewsbury: At the start of the session, the Minister talked about the overarching approach of inspire, plan and act to deliver our strategy. The act bit is also accountability. We are setting up a net zero reporting system that plays back the emissions to schools so that they can use that data usefully to know where they need to intervene on a local level. That is done through the climate action plan, so we are giving them ambassador support from university and engineering experts. We are helping them by giving them planning tools and also by playing back that data on climate risk, overheating, flood and drought, and also their emissions so they can see what thing they can do first to make the right steps.

On target setting, we will collate that information nationally to make sure we hit those targets. One thing to say is that the strategy has been a big



catalyst in trying to drive the movement towards this. We have seen an increase in PV in schools, presumably because of not just strategy, but other energy issues—from 19% from our emission data collection to 26% from the partial data collection we have had so far. We have seen heat pumps go up from 14% to 17%.

I think that the Minister has outlined one of the barriers as investment between 2025 and 2030, but what we are doing is removing the other barriers that are in this space, such as the supply chain and the technical standards required to deliver those buildings. We published specification 21 for our building standards, which meets the RIBA 2025 sustainability guidance. The pilots we are carrying out right now are designed to give us the data and information to make sure that we hit the RIBA 2030 standards. Then we have started the school resilience programme, which is making sure—as well as past emissions, we are also dealing with the increased flood, overheating and drought risks that face the estate.

If we think about that as a continuous improvement cycle, we set the standards that we are trying to deliver; make sure we can fund that through the spending review envelope that we have; support that delivery through our building programmes; measure that quality; and then draw on that experience to set the next standard to drive up. We are leading the way in our building standards in the education system.

Q19 Dr Matthew Offord: Does it apply to individual schools?

Dr Dewsbury: We will not set individual targets for schools. We will support them, making sure they get—

Dr Matthew Offord: Like your biodiversity target for each school, will you be able to say their biodiversity performance, or will we be able to look at an individual school's climate emissions—so not flood, not climate change, not drought, just emissions?

Dr Dewsbury: Yes. Initially when we baseline, we will take the data from the condition data collection, from their display energy certificate or from our VMFI, which is our financial tool where they report their energy costs. So we initially will be centrally quantifying or calculating their emissions at that level. We will then start playing the emissions back to schools so they can see where to take, and then we will get that two-way play through our net zero emissions board and then use that to test—

Dr Matthew Offord: Like school league tables, I will be able to say that a local school in my area is not performing environmentally or sustainably in the way another school is, for example.

Dr Dewsbury: I would not use the word league table. I say that we would be comparing them so that if you are a standard 6FE secondary, how do you compare to another 6FE secondary? Are you performing in the same way? It has an impact on your energy bills and your contribution to net zero.



Q20 Dr Matthew Offord: I realise you would not use the word league tables, but the press do, and I would expect and anticipate the press would do the same with this or, indeed, others would do that. As you say, it is very difficult to compare like for like, but would there be baselines where assessments would be able to be made at an individual level?

Baroness Barran: To be fair, through the VMFI financial insights, a school can already benchmark a number of elements of financial performance and their energy consumption, and they know their square meterage and so on. They can already bench that against most similar schools. There are already tools to do that. Going back to the school resource management, that is also something they do on a more personal, tailored basis.

Q21 Dr Matthew Offord: Thank you. Finally, I understand that the Department is looking for the current requirements of the greening Government commitments. When are you likely to meet those?

Baroness Barran: The greening Government commitments for us apply just to the Department's estate. Forgive me, I have it written down somewhere—here we go.

Dr Dewsbury: It is five core buildings and eight minor tenancies.

Baroness Barran: That is right. We are on track to meet our overall greenhouse gas emission target by 2025.

Q22 Dr Matthew Offord: What about water neutrality?

Baroness Barran: I do not have details on water neutrality. I know that we have already hit our waste reduction and recycling targets. I do not have the details with me. Forgive me on water neutrality, but we can come back to you on that.

Dr Matthew Offord: That is great. Thank you very much.

Q23 Cat Smith: What are your plans to improve the school-level data collection to show us about the sustainability across the school estate?

Baroness Barran: I think that we have already touched on a bit of that. We will be initially defining with schools what we see as climate risk, particularly in relation to overheating, flood and drought. We already have school-level data from the condition data collection survey. Through the climate action plans, we will also have detailed information about their emissions, water usage and so on, and will work with them and local experts supporting them to come up with their own plan to address and improve their sustainability.

Q24 Cat Smith: That is several things that will happen. Minister, could you put any timescale on that or give us an indication of when you expect that to happen?

Baroness Barran: The risk assessment framework is being introduced in January 2024 and will be implemented fully by January 2025. We will



start work on the climate action plans next year and they need to be returned to the Department in 2025. This is all within the next couple of years.

Dr Dewsbury: Can I add the steps we are taking on reporting emissions? It is important we are clear with the sector about what we want them to report. We started with the higher education sector, defining the standard of what we want them to report, which was published in January 2023. We have the draft of scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions that we want schools and nurseries to report being tested with the union groups and our user group.

That feeds into our discovery work for our emissions reporting system, which is built in with our digital support hub that supports the climate action plan. While we are keen to get the message out, we are not asking for reporting for the sake of reporting. We are asking for emission data to help play it back to schools, to help them make the right choices within their funding envelopes. The two-way information sharing will come through the climate action plan support hub, which has been tendered, and we are about to appoint the successful delivery partner organisations.

Baroness Barran: That also links to the earlier questions around governance and delivery plan, because clearly it is one thing to say that you have done certain things, but what we want to measure is the impact and the benefits of those actions. That is now beginning to move into action.

Q25 **Cat Smith:** The NAO report—I am particularly looking at figure 7—details the plans that the Department has. I am also aware that the Department told the NAO that it is limited in its capacity to analyse and use that information due to resource constraints. What plans do you have as a Department to find that expertise, or are you confident that you now have the expertise to be able to manage that data and make it usable?

Baroness Barran: Certainly in the risks presented to me, some of the changes that we talked about at the beginning, in terms of governance and increasing capacity in the team, as well as building our wider data and analytical capabilities, mean that we will be able to deal with that.

Q26 **Claudia Webbe:** Does the net zero strategy remain deliverable, given the uncertainty in funding and particularly that there are other pressing priorities? We have heard about the RAAC, for example.

Baroness Barran: This comes back to the question about the trajectory and whether we are going to get there. We are clear on where we have to get to. Resources are always a challenge across government, but I am confident that the work we and the team are doing will give us the most robust possible case, not just for the absolute amount of money but for the mix of activities.



For example, you will have seen that the Government audit department projected 650 school retrofits a year, if we keep the school rebuilding programme at 50 schools a year. Clearly, that mix could change, and we need to look at the detailed need out there and the best value for money to make that happen.

Q27 Claudia Webbe: What sustainability information is missing that would enable you to strategically allocate funding to schools?

Baroness Barran: There are a number of things. There is so much innovation in this area. We want to be sure that the solutions that we decide to scale across the school estate work for schools in their context, hence our pilot and pathfinder approach. We will gather very valuable information from that.

The other big thing is hearing from schools what they believe are the solutions. When we bring those two things together, I think we have a very powerful case not just for having confidence that we are doing the right thing, but having confidence that it will be deliverable and work and be implemented and adopted on the ground.

Dr Dewsbury: The purpose of our National Education Nature Park, the net zero reporting system, the climate action plan and then the climate risk framework is to give us that strategic picture of where the emissions are biggest on the education estate and where the risks are on the education estate.

We could probably already say that schools in particular sites of the country are more likely to be affected by flood, as opposed to others more likely to be impacted by drought. We want to be able to create that strategic view in the centre, to be able to support schools locally, by pulling the granular detail through the climate action plan digital hub or through our net zero reporting emissions tools.

Q28 Claudia Webbe: I suppose some of the difficulties are about understanding whether there is a clear grasp on the funding that is required to achieve the level of sustainability to achieve net zero. You have been doing some work with University College London in developing a digital model. Why have you not yet used the developed models to inform your funding approach?

Baroness Barran: I am not sure I quite follow. Can you give me an example?

Claudia Webbe: Out of the University College London digital models that you have developed—there are some models that have come out of that. Why not use some of those models to inform?

Baroness Barran: Jon will be able to go into the detail of the technicalities of the models. But the closer we can get to, as Jon just described, a detailed actual understanding of the school estate based on the facts of individual schools—that will be much more powerful than



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using models in isolation. Maybe you want to say something about how the models work.

Dr Dewsbury: We would agree with the intention that we would want to use a UCL model to help us allocate funding towards sustainability and climate change risks, but with any model we need to be confident of the accuracy of the data going into it, which is why, currently, the UCL model is simulated off seven building types. It is a simulation rather than a data model. We want to make sure we have all that information that we outlined through the nature park—so the biodiversity coming through that, the emissions data coming through our climate action plan and the risks coming through that to feed that model to make sure we are making accurate strategic investment.

Q29 **Claudia Webbe:** In the Public Accounts Committee session held on 11 September, the DFE's permanent secretary, Susan Acland-Hood, stated with respect to RAAC, "We have agreed with the Treasury that as we look at negotiations for the next SR, this will be our first priority for the capital spend." That seems to suggest that sustainability funding would be deprioritised.

Baroness Barran: I am sorry if that is what it suggests, but if we just look at the context in which she said that, we have already made a commitment that all new schools that we are building will be net zero in operation. Any of those RAAC schools that are rebuilt, by definition, will be net zero in operation.

Our criteria for rebuilding a school always takes into account wider condition and other needs. I appreciate not everything can be the top priority, but it is an absolute, given that all the schools that we build now are net zero in operation.

Q30 **Claudia Webbe:** In terms of the existing estate, obviously, if there were spending priorities elsewhere, the commitment towards sustainability funding to achieve the net zero strategy for schools becomes less and less—if there are other pressures.

Baroness Barran: I understand why you ask it, but in practice, there are, in simplest terms, two solutions for a school with RAAC. One is rebuild and the other is remediate. Remediate is a fraction of the cost of rebuild. Some schools will be remediated; others will be rebuilt if they meet our wider criteria in terms of condition need. However, they will be rebuilt to those same net zero standards. When we go into the next spending review and work out with the Treasury how many schools we will be rebuilding, condition is always a massive priority, but condition tends to go very frequently with sustainability and emissions.

Q31 **Claudia Webbe:** To be clear, are you suggesting that you do have sufficient funding to meet the net zero strategy?

Baroness Barran: I have not said that. Throughout, we know that it is an eight-year commitment and we are towards the end of a spending



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review period. So I could not possibly say that we did, because we need to have that conversation and agree it with the Treasury. What I am saying is everything we are doing is to put ourselves in the strongest possible position for that conversation, and those RAAC schools that end up being rebuilt will be because of the RAAC, but also, in almost all cases, because of much wider condition need.

Q32 Claudia Webbe: The Department for Education has recognised that significant investment is necessary to make an impact on emissions. How will you achieve this without sufficient funding?

Baroness Barran: We have to make the case to get sufficient funding. This is the next spending review we are speculating about.

Dr Dewsbury: In terms of our existing condition improvement fund, we have embedded the sustainability criteria within that. Schools applying for the condition improvement fund, which is £450 million for the last financial year, have to have a sustainability plan. We have prioritised replacement of coal and oil boilers with heat pumps within that programme.

The way we drive our condition programmes is around fabric first. If you improve the fabric of a building, thus improving the condition, you also improve the energy efficiency of it and thus reduce emissions. We adopt the principles from the RIBA sustainable outcomes guide from 2019. That is how we set up our building standards and our building programmes.

Q33 Chair: Picking you up on that, Dr Dewsbury, you prioritise that £150 million spending towards energy efficiency, but what we have heard from the NAO is that you do not have a monitoring system to check whether the money is spent in that way, because schools and accountable bodies have discretion over what they spend the money on.

Dr Dewsbury: Sorry, can I just clarify this? I think we are talking about two different lots of very similar numbers. I am talking about £450 million for our condition improvement fund, which is a condition improvement fund where we have embedded sustainability criteria into the applications from schools. They may be applying because they have to upgrade their electrical system or to replace their roof, so we embed sustainability in that. Chair, you are asking about the £447 million.

Chair: Correct—sorry, I thought you were rounding the amount of money.

Dr Dewsbury: No, sorry, I was not. Is the question about the £447 million energy efficiency grants?

Chair: The “basic need capital funding” is how it is described in the brief and uplifted basic needs.

Baroness Barran: Basic need, in my mind, normally means pupil places. We might get mired in terminology, but there were two lots of £450 million. One was specifically for energy efficiency grants. The NAO is right



that, in those, we very much encouraged schools and responsible bodies to use that, but we did not monitor every single grant. As Dr Dewsbury said, on the other £450 million—the condition improvement fund—the sustainability principles are embedded in the application process.

Q34 Chair: A suggestion perhaps: given the limited capital you have available for building new schools, and it is obviously limited on retrofitting old schools—there will be some questions on that in a moment—if you are providing funding for energy efficiency purposes, it might be a good idea to monitor in some way and get the schools to confirm that that is what they spent the money on, and then you can keep a track on it.

Again, going into a bit more detail on the new school building programme, you have identified that new schools will be built to sustainable standards and that is obviously sensible and achievable. However, the number of new schools in the new building programme is clearly very limited. At the date of the report, there were six net zero schools open and 28 others currently under construction. Are you able to update those figures? Have you allocated more money for new schools in the light of the RAAC incident, which I think came to light following the report that that might have had some influence on your ability and capital on net zero schools?

Baroness Barran: Yes. We have a total of 275 schools that either will or are due to meet the requirements of specification 21. Of that 275, 184 are in the school rebuilding programme, 89 are free schools and then two are from the priority school building programme. They are in different stages of readiness: 25 are in construction, 119 in procurement, 91 in feasibility and 38 in prefeasibility.

Dr Dewsbury: In terms of the total SRP—school rebuilding programme—slots, we have already selected and announced the 400 projects to date. That was announced in December last year.

Chair: Out of?

Baroness Barran: Out of 500.

Chair: Five hundred. That is during this Parliament, is it?

Baroness Barran: Yes.

Chair: We can look forward to another 100.

Baroness Barran: You can look forward to another 100. We did take the decision to announce 239 at the end of last year, in December 2022. What we found was that when we went round and visited schools that were being rebuilt, in too many cases they had done remediation work shortly before we sent the diggers in. I went to one school where they had something like £3 million-worth of windows on a heap, which had been put in 18 months earlier and then we were tearing the block down. We felt that if we could give schools plenty of warning—even though it is



frustrating to wait for a school to arrive, it is better to know that it is coming than not—we could avoid some of that wasted expenditure.

May I add just one other point, which I think might be relevant to the Committee in terms of the rebuilding programme? The other thing we changed last year was that we allowed the responsible bodies of the local authority or the trust or the diocese to nominate the schools that they thought were most in need of rebuilding. There were multiple examples of schools that went in and were successful because of climate-related issues, particularly flooding. I can think of two or three that got funding that would not have done under our previous criteria. We are trying to learn and improve as we go.

- Q35 **Chair:** That was going to be my last question. How do you embed learning? I assume you are also looking at trying to provide a modular style of building so that the actual building materials used can—I do not know if there is a catalogue that responsible bodies can pick from. To avoid the green learning of each entity, which is going through a once-in-a-generation procurement, there must be some benefits that you can spread across the system.

Baroness Barran: The main one is that we changed the approach to delivery of the school rebuilding programme. Previously, it was not central delivery, so local authorities or trusts delivered the building project. We took that back to the centre, partly from a procurement point of view. As you say, we can put out much bigger contracts and get better value for money but also miles on the clock. It is just that we bring greater experience to it. We have significantly reduced the cost of delivery and we think that that is a pretty good model going forward.

- Q36 **Chair:** Can you illustrate how you have reduced the delivery costs? That will be very interesting.

Baroness Barran: We can follow up in more detail in writing, but the main thing is that there are two elements that cost money. One is fragmented procurement. We are able to centralise and give out much bigger contracts. One of the conversations I have had with some of our suppliers of modular buildings is: if we were able to guarantee a bigger workflow, how much could they reduce their costs so that they have the confidence that their factories will be full? That is one element. The other element is just time. We are able to execute faster and time is money, as we know.

Chair: That is very helpful. That accounts for about 2% of the total schools in the portfolio. Perhaps Robin might want to ask you about the 98%.

- Q37 **Mr Robin Walker:** Indeed. We talked about the new builds. On the 98% that are not going to be rebuilt, how do they get funding for sustainability issues? You mentioned CIF and obviously that is very heavily oversubscribed. How much of a factor should this be for local authorities,



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for instance, looking at the devolved capital that they get for academy trusts, and looking at the money that they get from the Department?

Baroness Barran: Obviously, CIF is not the only funding stream, as the Committee knows very well. There is also the school capital allocation, which goes to larger academy trusts and to local authorities. As Dr Dewsbury said in response to an earlier question, we start with fabric first. The idea that there are two totally different things—one is condition spend and one is sustainability and resilience—I think is an artificial distinction. There is a very significant overlap.

Again, we follow the RIBA guidance on this and start with fabric and move through mechanical and electrical and down. Renewables comes right at the bottom of its list of priorities. It is not to say that we will not need to accelerate some of this expenditure; it is to say that there is not a significant retrofit challenge, but I think there is a very significant overlap between the two.

Dr Dewsbury: One example we are exploring is the net zero accelerator service. That is one way. Then we will continue conversations with the Department of Energy Security and Net Zero for the PSDS.

Q38 **Mr Robin Walker:** How many retrofits are going on a year at the moment across the whole piece? Obviously, there are a lot of different areas under which those might fall.

Dr Dewsbury: I think the word “retrofit” is quite a broad term. Our school rebuilding programme is replacing blocks so that is technically a retrofit. It depends what we mean by retrofit. If we mean retrofit in terms of replacing specifically the heating and gas systems, or if we mean improving fabric, improving roofing structures, improving the passive behaviour of a building—

Q39 **Mr Robin Walker:** It is a fair point. The challenge is, I guess, compared to the 500 new schools, the number of schools that are having significant work done on them in terms of their sustainability will be a larger figure, but it will still be a relatively small proportion of the 20,000 schools across the country. The NAO figures suggested that around 20% of the existing estate will have had some retrofitting done on it by 2050. That still leaves 80% of the estate that, from the perspective of sustainability and climate change, will need work. What is the plan for ensuring that there is a good bid going into the Treasury to support that work?

Baroness Barran: Forgive me, but we can only repeat what we said already around the building blocks of the plan, the data from schools, the plans that schools have themselves and the aggregation of that into a mix of rebuild and retrofit, even if those are not perfect distinctions, and increasingly, with the challenge of the trajectory that we have talked about a couple of times, the dialling up of that retrofit element within that. I think that I mentioned the 650 schools that the Government Actuary’s Department suggested would need a retrofit, by which I think they mean get them to net zero but without a rebuild. That was a £2



billion-a-year bill, if I remember correctly. We are talking significant amounts of money here.

Dr Dewsbury: In terms of the specific work we are doing to prepare for a case to make to Treasury, we can think through the history of how we set our standards. So to start off in 2017, we think about the thermal comfort of buildings and then pitch for that. We then did MMC—modern methods of construction—in 2019. Our spec that we got funding for 2021 was around operational net zero.

The pilots we have under hand at the moment are around improving our spec to make sure we have ultra-low embodied carbon within our specs, and then we have started the pilots for resilient schools. That is testing retrofit intervention and adaptation—so resilience, retrofit and adaptation. That information on those pilots will feed our technical specs and make sure our supply chains can deliver them. The question around funding is then one to be had with Treasury.

Q40 Mr Robin Walker: Has the Department done any systematic analysis of the environmental performance of temporary buildings across the school estate? We discussed previously this issue around schools being reliant on temporary buildings, which are very expensive to heat and, therefore, likely to be very difficult to get into a better standard of environmental performance. With the RAAC situation, clearly there are unfortunately more temporary buildings in use. With the big expansion in secondary school placements needed, there are likely to be more temporary buildings in use. How do we ensure that they are playing their part in meeting the Department's climate and sustainability goals?

Baroness Barran: Of course, there are temporary buildings and temporary buildings. Like you, we have all visited schools with temporary buildings that were temporary a very long time ago and are incredibly expensive to run. Despite multiple meetings with Portakabin over the last few weeks, for obvious reasons I can't actually remember the energy specification of the new ones, but I know that they are vastly superior to those of old. If I may, we will write to the Committee with details of that.

Dr Dewsbury: Our technical standards team will set the specification for what the temporary building structures we put in need to hit. You will see Portakabin deliver to a wide range of industries or sectors. We make sure that the teaching accommodation it delivers for us meets the standards we require for temporary accommodation.

Q41 Claudia Webbe: Given that we have received information that 80% of the existing estate is unlikely to be retrofitted by 2050, I think we just need a clear explanation, if that can be provided, of how this will be done by 2050. I do not think we have had that, but without taking up more of the Committee's time, if that can be sent to us, that would be great.

Chair: Is that something you could do?



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Baroness Barran: Within the caveats of future spending reviews, of course. We are happy to do that.

Q42 **Barry Gardiner:** My apologies to the witnesses for arriving late today. I want to ask you about the pilot projects, but before I do, can I just ask you about baselines? You have said that schools are doing their own assessments—forgive me if I have missed this in something that you have said previously—but are you looking to be able to judge what work you do where on the basis of maximum mitigation potential?

Baroness Barran: We always have to consider the condition and safety of the school as well as the sustainability aspects of it. As we said earlier, in relation to rebuild and retrofit, those are not entirely different things at all. If the fabric is very poor and the condition is very poor, then the sustainability will also be very poor. However, while we will be tracking our performance against our targets, ultimately the safety of our children is clearly the No. 1 thing. I just do not want to promise that sustainability sits on its private pedestal. Ultimately, safety will—but the two are not different. If a school is in very poor condition, it will also have—

Q43 **Barry Gardiner:** There is clearly a correlation here. Let us look at a situation where safety is out of the consideration, and from the environmental point of view, I am looking at carbon, basically—I am looking at emissions. What I want to try to understand is what baselines you will have and how you will have obtained them. Is there a standard assessment that schools will have to do to give you clarity about what their current emissions levels are and then from that baseline you can work out the maximum mitigation potential in any school and decide, “It is better to spend our money here rather than there”?

Baroness Barran: Yes, and some of that we touched on. I will let Dr Dewsbury talk about the technical detail. Some of this is a triaging of information. We have information on the expenditure on energy for every school and we can benchmark that against other schools of similar types, and the schools themselves can already benchmark that. We have an energy performance certificate and then there will be additional information we will be gathering. Do you want to comment on that?

Q44 **Barry Gardiner:** I do not want to put you off but I do not think anybody would try to claim EPCs are a terribly reliable way of—

Baroness Barran: No, I hear you, I am just saying they are part of the—

Barry Gardiner: Also, taking energy spend is not going to be a good method because if you are a school in the north of the country, your energy spend will inevitably be much greater than a school that might be in sunnier and leafier parts of the country.

Baroness Barran: I hear you, but at the same time one can benchmark relative to similar schools in similar climates.



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Dr Dewsbury: We said earlier in the meeting that we have published a standard for how higher education and further education should report their emissions. Scope 1, scope 2 and scope 3 we have in draft, which we have shared with the unions and our user group—that for schools and nurseries. That obviously sets the baseline because we are making sure everyone is reporting emissions in the same way. We have an initial baseline from the then BEIS report of the education sector—4.1 megatons of CO₂ equivalent. We will then use the data that the Minister spoke about to improve that baseline through our condition data, our energy bill data, which has kilowatt-hours on, so we can work from there—not just the cost—from those that report under the streamlined energy carbon reporting, and from DEC certificates. Once the climate action plan support hub is there, it will provide another data input source to then get the granular emission data from those schools without putting a burden on schools to have to mandatorily report. We want to make sure they are doing their predominant function of teaching, not reporting emissions.

Your question at the start was around our prioritisation of mitigation. Based on the Minister's point around safety, we will focus our adaptation first. Mitigation is obviously critical, but making sure our schools remain open and resilient to the effect of flood or having a drought will be our key thing.

Finally, we also need to think about the size of the education estate emissions in the context of the UK emissions and the bigger prize to be had. If we think it is 37% of public sector emissions, which is 2% of UK emissions, and we know the majority of UK emissions come from consumer expenditure or from transport, it is about thinking about what we can do through the education system, through the 16 million people we can influence, to move those dials.

Q45 **Barry Gardiner:** Agreed, but this has slightly moved away from the question. Let me push on to the pilot project. How are you going to assess whether they are successful or not?

Baroness Barran: We are following the RIBA criteria and will use its targets and metrics for our assessment.

Q46 **Barry Gardiner:** If you get funding in SR25, will you be able to roll all those assessment metrics out at scale fast enough to hit the 2030 target?

Baroness Barran: Do you mean to roll out and scale up the pilots—

Barry Gardiner: Yes.

Baroness Barran: The point of the pilot is that obviously not all of them will be as successful as others. Our job will be to scale the most successful in time. We have said, in the interests of being absolutely transparent, that the challenge is to get on to that trajectory for delivery. We think we will do it more effectively with good building blocks of the baselining and so on, but our job will then be to move at great speed.



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That is why our delivery board is starting to look at impact as well as delivery. It is good to have done it but it is better to have made a difference.

Dr Dewsbury: Perhaps I can talk about the GenZero pathway projects, to give you an example of the pace on which we are moving through on those. We built a 1:30 model of that ahead of COP26. We took a full classroom prototype to COP26. We now have onsite the full school builds.

Q47 **Barry Gardiner:** The GenZero stuff is on the diagram you have provided for us. The GenZero stuff is relatively the easiest because it is the new-build stuff. It is more the retrofitting, the operational costs and how you transition the school that are going to provide more problems for you, if I can put it that way. If you are starting with a clean piece of ground, it is easier to know what you are doing.

Dr Dewsbury: That is why we have the four school resilience pilot projects, which will feed into our retrofit specification that will align with the next spending review Budget decisions. That is part of our continuous cycle, setting the standards. It might be useful to know the targets we are hitting on those. We are trying to hit an operational energy of less than 55 kWh per metre squared per year. We are trying to make sure the embodied carbon is less than 500 kilograms. These are the RIBA standards. We are also making sure we are factoring in the potable water use and the land use and biodiversity targets that come from Natural England or other local authorities.

Q48 **Barry Gardiner:** My final question is: what carbon price are you using when you make your case to Treasury?

Baroness Barran: Honestly, I have no idea. I apologise.

Dr Dewsbury: I will have to write to you about that.

Q49 **Chris Skidmore:** I have touched already on adaptation and climate risk. I want to ask what work the DFE is doing to identify and address priority climate risks that have been picked up by the Committee on Climate Change—namely flood risk, water scarcity and overheating.

Baroness Barran: We are creating a framework by which to measure and assess those risks—specifically flood, water scarcity and overheating. We are publishing that in January of 2024 and the actual risks will be published by January 2025.

Dr Dewsbury: The evidence from that risk assessment is through work we have commissioned with the Met Office and the Government Office for Science, so they are both looking into the risk of overheating on educational outcomes and the flood risk over the education estate.

Q50 **Chris Skidmore:** Is that one of the reasons there has been a slight delay? I think the climate risk assessment was due to be published in May, from what I understand—from my briefing at least.



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Dr Dewsbury: We are trying to align it with the national adaptation programme publication cycle so it fits with the CCC recommendations at the right time.

Q51 **Chris Skidmore:** You mentioned the work you have done with the Met Office and have given an indication that it will be made fully public as part of your formal response in January. In terms of flooding in particular, the statistics show that, at the moment, 10,710 schools are at significant risk of flood and that could potentially rise to 13,662 by 2050. How is the Department seeking to address that?

Baroness Barran: Gathering the information so we understand, because clearly the degree of risk varies tremendously across those schools, which is nearly half the school estate. One of the key ways will be through the climate action plans, where we will be able to work with schools to understand the specific risk they face and work with them to address it. Obviously, that comes back to having sufficient funding to be able to deliver.

Dr Dewsbury: We are already working with the Environment Agency in local schemes to improve community flood resilience for the schools in those areas. Through our risk protection arrangement, which is the insurance that schools use that the Department offers, we are making sure that if schools are flooded or at risk, they have the right measures in place, such as blocks on toilets to stop the floodwater coming back up, flood doors on the perimeter of the school, and so on. Of those we know are using our RPA insurance already, we are trying to take proactive measures in those spaces.

Q52 **Chris Skidmore:** With flooding, you mentioned insurance as a specific demand requirement and identifying those individual schools at risk and taking measures to adapt. On an issue such as heat resilience, you mentioned the Met Office data. We have received evidence in our inquiry that that is another area that is incredibly important from the Department's perspective, around pupil attainment. There is a 35% reduction in academic productivity at 35°C. Will there be a similar assessment to identify schools that are particularly at risk of overheating in the same way as there is for flooding?

Baroness Barran: If we just take rebuilding as an example, when schools apply to us and say they want a particular part of the school rebuilt, we assess all those things when we go in, including overheating. We may well end up—this may have happened in your constituency; I do not know—where a school has asked for one block to be rebuilt, we end up saying, "We think we should do three" and that could be one of the reasons. There may be a number of other reasons. All those things are taken into consideration.

In relation to the refurbishment and condition funding, to be fair, that is much more schools saying, "These are the things that matter to us" and then we judge whether they meet our criteria or not. As we said earlier,



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for the condition investment fund, schools now have to have environmental sustainability targets built in, so it is woven through our funding approach.

Dr Dewsbury: Specifically on overheating, our design standard is to design for a 2°C temperature rise, resilient to a 4°C temperature rise. The standard we measure against is that overheating is limited to 1% of occupied hours for 25°C to 28°C because we are aware, as you pointed out, of the impacts on educational attainment.

Q53 **Chris Skidmore:** To be clear, in terms of the timelines for action on climate risk, we have the climate risk assessment that will be published in January 2025 with the implication for that being that it needs to be applicable for January 2025.

Baroness Barran: For 2025, that is right.

Q54 **Chris Skidmore:** What will this mean for schools that are identified and affected by the assessment plan?

Baroness Barran: Do you want to take that? I will then come back in on carbon pricing because we have an answer for Mr Gardiner.

Dr Dewsbury: The first thing to say is that schools are already taking action. What we are trying to do is to give them the tools and support to help them take action. Those that are aware of their risks are already starting to do that, working with either the local authority or centrally with us to do it. We are not asking anybody to wait for our climate risk assessment or our climate action plan tools to come out. By us being permissive with our sustainability and climate change strategy, we are saying this an important thing for schools and colleges to take action on.

Q55 **Chris Skidmore:** An important point around the nature of adaptation is that what we know now is not going to be the same as what we potentially may need to know in the future and that schools will not have the capability and capacity to identify the need to adapt, which is why they need leadership. What is in their floodplain at the moment will not necessarily be in the floodplains of tomorrow. What is necessarily an area of overheating, because of a glass building today—there will be more buildings overheating. I do not think schools or even local authorities have the ability to necessarily quantify that. so that is where your leadership is vital.

Dr Dewsbury: Our leadership comes through the sustainability leadership and climate action plan programme. We are about to award the delivery supplier of that. It has the ambassador network, which pulls out the experts from leading universities and engineering companies, who work with schools to help them implement their climate action plan. The pillars within that climate action plan are decarbonisation, adaptation and resilience because of the changing environment, biodiversity, and then their ethos on climate education and careers. We want to accelerate that climate action planning programme as fast as we can. We are aware



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of lots of other organisations, such as the national education climate plan group, which will move that forward alongside us. We are providing the leadership. We have set out the requirements for what we want to see. It is now to empower those to deliver it through the system.

Baroness Barran: Those plans are due to be in place in 2025, so they are on their way.

Q56 **Chris Skidmore:** Apologies, I was not here. I had to speak on the Energy Bill earlier. I have a question on retrofitting boilers. We have a mandate for no new gas boilers, which has been slightly altered as a result of the Government's recent changes. You mentioned, Dr Dewsbury, prioritising the removal of oil and coal-fired boilers. It is remarkable that we still have coal-fired boilers in schools—four you said. I just wondered: do we have a similar mandate for schools?

I know MPs relate to personal examples. At my daughter's school, the gas boiler is on its last legs. They are thinking about applying for the public sector decarbonisation fund, but if they do not get that, they might need to replace like with like—another gas boiler that is going to last for 40 to 50 years; the big community boilers that schools use. Potentially, we could see some schools using gas into the 2070s and beyond. I wondered whether the Department has a mandate for no new gas boilers for schools in the same way the Government have for households.

Dr Dewsbury: There is no mandate. Our specification for retrofit or building has ground-sourced first, air-sourced, and it is only through a hierarchy, if you cannot deliver those, that you use a gas boiler.

Q57 **Chris Skidmore:** There will be no retro-funding for any school that tried to replace one gas boiler with another gas boiler?

Dr Dewsbury: We have 45 coming through our condition improvement fund where we are replacing fossil fuel boilers with heat pumps. We have had a pilot scheme where we have been testing those around the country. That is where the net zero accelerator service comes in. We are looking to have that to try to resolve that gap you are identifying.

Q58 **Chris Skidmore:** Even a ministerial letter or signal from the Department to show leadership that it is unacceptable for any school to think about replacing an old gas boiler with a new gas boiler would be helpful. Obviously, there are challenges with that, but I think that is something we could identify as a challenge. If it is good enough for households, it should be good enough for schools.

Baroness Barran: We can take that away and I will discuss that with colleagues. Chair, I am really sorry—

Chair: That was Mr Skidmore's final question.

Baroness Barran: I wanted to come back on Mr Gardiner's question. We are going to be using the Treasury Green Book for our carbon valuations.



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Barry Gardiner: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you, Minister, for your time.

Baroness Barran: A great pleasure.

Chair: Apologies for it having been interrupted. Thank you, Dr Dewsbury, for joining the Minister. That concludes our session.